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## Mary Spears

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CONTRIBUTED BY JAMES B. BEEKMAN.

The following incidents of border experience, are written out from materials furnished by an accomplished lady residing at Paddock's Grove, in Illinois. They were communicated to her by the heroine herself, and by her children and friends; and are related as they were first told, without the least attempt at embellishment.

Mary Nealy was born on the 20th August, 1761, not far from Charleston, South Carolina, but when she was very young, her father removed his family to Tennessee; the emigrants passing through Georgia to the place where now stands Chattanooga. The family were sent down the Tennessee river in canoes, taking with them their household stuff, clothes and provisions, while the father drove his horses and cattle along the banks; the two parties joining each other at the Muscle Shoals, where they proceeded by land to the locality afterwards called Nealy's Bend, on the Cumberland river, near the site of Nashville. This must have been about the time of the first discovery of that spot—named "the French Lick"—which was made, according to Haywood, by a party of adventurers descending the Cumberland on their way to Natchez.<sup>1</sup> Our adventurous pioneer lived here several years, among the buffaloes, elks, wolves, etc., which crowded the adjoining hills and forests, probably familiar with the sight of few human faces, and seeing but at intervals the French hunters and trappers from the north, who ventured so far into the wilderness. Mrs. Nealy took upon herself the task of teaching her daughters, hearing their spelling and reading lessons, while she was busily spinning on her little

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<sup>1</sup> See "*Pioneer Women of the West*"—Memoir of Mary Bledsoe.

wheel, material for their garments. This simple instruction was all the girls received; when other settlers came, and a primitive school was established, the sons were sent three miles to attend it every day, the path through the woods being so infested with wolves that they were usually obliged to go on horseback.

After the commencement of the Revolutionary struggle, when hostilities threatened the inhabitants of that remote frontier, the family, with others in the neighborhood, sought refuge in a fort; the men venturing out as opportunity permitted, to attend to the cattle and cultivate their fields. Nealy was engaged in making salt, and was sometimes assisted by his daughter Mary, or Polly, as she was called. On a Sabbath morning in the fall of 1770<sup>2</sup>, (1780) the young girl, wearing her Sunday dress, left the station in company with her father, and walked with him to the bank of the river, where for the week past his manufacture of salt had been going on. Mary happened to be standing at some little distance from her father, when suddenly she heard the report of a gun and saw him fall to the ground. She had only time to see an Indian leap from his covert, when she lost her consciousness in a swoon. On her recovery, she found herself in the grasp of two of the savages, who were dragging her off with all possible haste, evidently apprehensive of pursuit from the station, which was at no great distance. No aid came, however, and the helpless girl was compelled to go on with her captors. They were three days without food; at length a bear was killed, and a piece of flesh given to the starving captive, which she ate raw. This imprudence produced severe illness, which was relieved by drinking a quantity of the bear's oil, according to Indian prescription.

The prisoner was offered her choice between becoming the wife of the chief's son, or the slave of his oldest wife; she chose the latter, and soon made herself so useful that the savages determined to spare her life. The party continued

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<sup>2</sup> Misprint. Should be 1780.

some time in Tennessee and Kentucky, and often encamped in canebrakes. One night in attempting to escape—for the hope of finding her way back to home and friends was still cherished by the unfortunate girl—after leaving the encampment, she chanced to step on a sharp fragment of cane, which ran entirely through her foot. She was of course recaptured, and suffered the extremest agony from the wound, which was not entirely healed for months afterward. During this time, having learned something of the Indian language, she frequently heard the advice given to kill and scalp her, rather than be troubled with carrying about such a poor cripple; and it is probable that nothing saved her but her knowledge of sewing and other kinds of work, which made her a valuable servant to her mistress.

Notwithstanding the failure of this attempt, the hope of being able to avail herself of an opportunity to escape still had possession of her mind. One night when the Indians had encamped on the bank of a small stream, a heavy storm came on. To obtain shelter, Mary climbed into a tree completely canopied by a luxuriant grape-vine. In a short time after she had thus secured herself, a fierce gust of wind uprooted a large tree near by, and it fell with a tremendous crash, immediately over the place she had quitted. She heard the savages calling to her amidst the darkness and the driving storm, and when they received no answer, ascertained by their exclamations that they supposed she had been killed. A flash of joy penetrated her heart; here was an opportunity of escape! She remained still, while the Indians called and shouted repeatedly; but when they were silent, fear began to shake her new-born hopes. She had been severely punished for the previous attempt, and threatened with the tomahawk if it were ever repeated. Should she leave the tree, the dogs would in all probability discover her, and give the alarm. On the other hand, might she not regard her having been impelled to seek this shelter, and the fall of the tree, as a special interposition of Providence in her favor, and could she not throw herself upon this manifest protection? Uncertain what

to do, she remained in the tree all night, not answering the calls which were repeated at intervals, in hope the Indians would break up camp and depart before day, as they always did when apprehensive of pursuit. She was found, however, and compelled to accompany them in their northward course, and having crossed the Ohio, gave up in despair the faint hope that had remained in her breast, of being restored to her kindred. With the loss of this hope her trust even in the merciful Father who had preserved her through so many dangers, seemed also to fail. But her extreme sufferings from hunger, cold, and fatigue, were sufficient to overcome greater strength than she possessed.

Fortune seemed to delight in mocking her with opportunities of escape, by which she could not profit. One night when they had encamped, a snow-storm came on, and she was completely covered by a snowdrift. In the morning, as the Indians were preparing to continue their journey, she could be found nowhere, and they concluded she had gone off during the night. Their anger was loudly expressed, and the most terrible tortures threatened, if she should again fall into their power. Hearing all this imperfectly, and only understanding that she was wanted, Mary rose from under her white coverlet in the very midst of the infuriated savages, whose shouts of astonishment and merriment, when they discovered the truth, were absolutely deafening. It was a bitter thought to her, that had she known how securely she was concealed, she might have remained in safety. The morning meal of the Indians was a large black snake, which was roasted and divided. A few inches only fell to the poor girl's share, but the piquant sauce of hunger made it seem delicious food. She was always permitted to share in everything with her captors.

At one time, when the men were all absent from the camp, a large deer was seen making directly toward it. The old chief's wife ordered Mary to take a gun and shoot the animal, as she was known to be the best shot among all the women. The chief had expressly forbidden firing, on pain of death, in the absence of his men, the discharge of a gun being the ap-

pointed signal of the near approach of an enemy, and Mary hesitated to obey; but being urged, she fired and shot the deer. In a few moments the Indians came rushing in, expecting to encounter the foe; and, when informed that it was a false alarm, the chief raised his tomahawk to kill the white girl who had dared to disobey his commands. His wife threw herself between him and the intended victim, exclaiming that she herself was the offender; but for a moment, as the uplifted weapon was whirled several times round the Indian's head, Mary expected he would bury it in her own. Perhaps the prospect of plenty of savory venison for supper did something to pacify the angry warrior.

At another time, when, by some means or other, the small-pox was introduced among the party, the captive became desperately ill with that terrible disease. For ten days she was entirely blind, being left alone in a lodge built for her at some distance from the camp, near a spring. Her food was brought and left at the spring, to which she would grope her way once in the twenty-four hours. Her sufferings were somewhat alleviated by an ointment made by simmering prickly pear in bear's grease, which a compassionate squaw prepared for her. During this season of distress, she often wished for death, and sometimes the temptation was strong to rend the ulcers that covered her face; but the thought of home, and the hope of being at some future day delivered from her cruel bondage, would support her to a patient endurance of her protracted trials.

Some of the articles in our heroine's possession, had been taken from her. A knife was left her, which she preserved with the greatest care, and took every opportunity, when she could be unobserved, of cutting her name on the bark of trees, in the hope that the marks might lead to her rescue. She also retained a pair of silver shoe-buckles, of which no one offered to deprive her.

It is supposed that this party of Indians remained about a year in the northwestern part of Tennessee, at the forks of Cumberland and Tennessee rivers, and near the junction of

the Ohio, with the Mississippi. Passing into what is now Indiana, they spent some time at a place called "French Lick." Several white prisoners were brought in, meanwhile, from Tennessee and Kentucky; amongst them, a man named Riddle and his two daughters, who were occasionally in Miss Nealy's company. At all times, when her health permitted, Mary was engaged in some useful occupation, never caring how laborious it might be, as her mental disquietude was thus relieved. The only employment she objected to, was the moulding of bullets, to which she was often compelled.

As the journey was continued, she became acquainted with a French fur trader, whom she besought to aid her in effecting her escape. He would not listen to her entreaties, and she left him indignant at his want of humane feeling. A little conscience-stricken, perhaps, for his refusal, he brought a blanket the next day and offered it to her; but she rejected the gift, saying that she scorned to receive anything from a heartless wretch, who was too cowardly to give her the aid she required.

After they had passed into Michigan, where their numbers were increased by other captives, one of the females, weak from exhaustion and carrying an infant a few months old, failed to keep up with the rest, though assisted occasionally by the kind-hearted squaws. When they recamped at night, a consultation was held among the men, and it was resolved to kill the child. They had built a large fire, and when the wood had been consumed to a bed of glowing coals, one of the warriors snatched the babe from its mother's breast and threw it into the midst. It was instantly drawn out and thrown back into the arms of its distracted mother; again snatched from her and thrown into the fire to be again drawn out; and this fiendish pastime was repeated amidst the screams of the agonized parent, and hideous yells from the savages, leaping and dancing the while with frantic gestures, till life was extinct in the little victim; when it was torn to pieces by the murderers. Scenes like this which were not of uncommon occurrence, inspired Miss Nealy with a feeling of detestation to-

wards the perpetrators of such outrages, which became habitual, and amounted to a vindictive hate, of which she could never wholly divest herself. She would never speak their language unless compelled by circumstances to use it, and used to say, that the only favor she ever asked of them was, that she might be put to death. When, in after life, a favorite granddaughter, who had been born and reared in her house expressed a desire to wear ear-rings, and was about to purchase a pair, she persuaded her not to do so, speaking with melancholy earnestness on the subject, saying she should never be able to look at her beloved child without pain, if decorated with ornaments which would so strongly remind her of her savage enemies.

It was Miss Nealy's lot to witness, at one time, the punishment of a young Indian and his paramour, for a crime rarely committed among the savage tribes. The criminals were bound to separate trees and stoned to death, the white prisoners being compelled to see the execution.

Many more incidents of adventure, perils and sufferings, are remembered by the family and descendants of our heroine, of her forest travel and sojourn with her wild companions. But the limits of a brief sketch permit only the record of those necessary to illustrate the experience common to too many in those fearful days of our republic. After a captivity of two years, the prisoners were taken to Detroit, where the Indians expected to receive from the British Government, payment for the scalps they had brought. The savages received much attention from the English, as important allies, while encamped in the neighborhood of the city. Mary was sent every day to the house of a French resident, to procure milk for a sick child of the chief. She saw the mistress of the house frequently, who became interested in her when she learned her history. One morning, she told her to come on the following day; to drop her milk can outside the gate, enter the house without rapping, and proceed directly to a certain room. The poor girl had been suffering from chills and fever for several weeks. The next morning, when she was ordered to go for



milk, it happened that her paroxysm of fever was upon her. In the half delirious state of her brain, she had been forming a plan of escape, and resolving that she would take with her the shoe-buckles which constituted all her wealth; and she was looking for them in a box when the order was repeated. She persisted in her search, being able to find but one, when her angry master struck her, and threatened to kill her at once, if she hesitated to obey. Turning suddenly round, she begged him to do so, and put an end to her sufferings, for the pain and bewilderment of fever had caused her to forget that she might soon be free. However, she set out, but soon returned and dropped the odd buckle into the box, to be again beaten and sent on her errand. By the time she had reached the Frenchman's gate, her senses were sufficiently restored to remember the directions of the day previous. When the Indians came in search of her, the woman of the house informed them that the girl had come to the gate, apparently in anger, had thrown down the vessels and departed, she did not know whither—up the street. On the following day, men were sent by the city authorities to whom complaint had been made by the Indians, to search the house; but no trace of the fugitive could be found. All this time, Mary lay quietly concealed in a small dark closet, the door of which, opening into a larger one, could not be easily discovered. It was a place constructed expressly for stowing away plate, money, or other valuables, when a ransacking was threatened.

Miss Nealy occupied that room for a month, hidden from all eyes, and sustained by the kind care of her benefactress. An accident had nearly betrayed and remanded her to captivity. One day when looking carelessly from the window, she was startled by seeing the face of an Indian, whom she knew too well, and by the gleam of his eye, she saw that he had also recognized her. She hastened to inform her protectress, and implore her aid. There was no time to be lost, for the savages would not be slow in reclaiming their prisoner. She was supplied immediately with boy's apparel, which she put on; her hair was cut off, and she was sent, accompanied by the son of

her hostess, half a mile into the city to the house of another kind-hearted Frenchwoman, who gave her shelter, and kept her concealed through several weeks. Work was also procured for her from a tailor,<sup>3</sup> and she was enabled to earn sufficient to clothe herself comfortably. When the fear of pursuit was over, she was removed by night to an island in the river, where she found seventeen other captives whom she had met before, in her travels through Indiana, Ohio, or Michigan; some of them having been purchased by the British authorities, some having escaped through the assistance of the French inhabitants of the city.

Our heroine remained but three weeks in this new asylum. Upon leaving the island, the captives were conveyed down the lakes, stopping some time at Niagara, and down the St. Lawrence river, and were landed upon the shore of Lake Champlain, where they were exchanged as prisoners of war. Before they quitted the vessel, one of the British officers endeavored to exact a promise from the company, which consisted of women, old men, and boys, that they would not aid or abet the continentals against the royal government during the continuance of the war. This heroic woman was accustomed to relate, with much dignity and spirit, how she refused to give the pledge, and challenged the officer to go on shore with her into the thicket of bushes, where she "would cut out a switch and brush him till he would be glad to promise, on his own part, that he would never again be caught upon provincial ground." She would describe the scene with as much pride at ninety, as she could have acted in it three-score and ten years before. The others caught a portion of her spirit, and in very truth cut them switches as soon as they were on shore, daring the officer to come on, and giving three cheers for the brave young woman.

Her companions told her also that they were in expectation of seeing one of the American generals in a few days, and that when he came he would provide her with a horse and sad-

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<sup>3</sup> This tailor gave her a box, carried to represent a Bible and this box is now in possession of Chas. G. Spears of Tallula.

dle. She continued her journey with this company for several days, and when the others faltered from fatigue, and were unable to proceed, she went on in the hope of finding employment among the Dutch settlers, her only companions being an old man and two boys. After a day or two of weary travel in the snow, these also gave up, and one morning left her to proceed alone. It was a sad day for her—tramping on through the snow and water in which her feet plunged at every step, and toward evening a heavy rain drenched her garments. Yet her courage did not fail, for she had now before her the hope of eventually reaching her beloved home, and felt that her success depended on herself alone. She could not persuade herself to stop for rest till after dark, when she came up to the door of a small cabin where a cheerful light was glimmering. Very cheering was the aspect of the huge blazing logs in the ample chimney, but other comforts there were none; scarce even a morsel of bread, and not a bed could be furnished on which to lay her wearied limbs. She was, however, accustomed to hardships, and lying down on the floor with her feet to the fire, without stopping to dry her clothes, soon fell into a profound slumber. In the morning she awoke in great distress from oppression at the lungs, and unable to speak except in a whisper. The woman in the cabin, though wretchedly poor, had a kind heart, and made the suffering stranger as comfortable as she could. Miss Nealy, from her acquaintance with Indian life, had acquired a knowledge of disease and of medicine, which now proved useful in her own case. She happened to have some medicines about her, which she directed the good woman how to prepare and administer. A severe attack of illness finally yielded to the youthful vigor of her constitution, strengthened by endurance of all kinds of hardships, but it was some weeks before she was able to travel.

In the fear of a recurrence of scurvy, from which she had previously suffered, she procured at a little settlement a few days' journey from this cabin, a small quantity of snuff and other simple remedies prescribed by a traveller, spending almost the last penny she possessed for these and a little ja-

panned snuff-box, which she presented a few days ago to the narrator of these incidents of her history. In this settlement she also learned that a farmer who lived in the vicinity intended to remove with his family in the spring to the southwestern part of Virginia; and that his wife was in want of a "help" to spin, weave, and make up men's and boys' clothing. This was good news indeed, and she lost no time in making application to be received in that capacity.

During the winter our heroine labored very assiduously, doing the washing of the family and milking the cows, in addition to the other employments for which her services had been engaged; thus leaving herself not a moment of relief from toil till late bedtime, and receiving in return only fifty cents a week, and but a small part of her wages in money.

When the family set out in the spring on their southward journey, she assisted in driving the stock, as well as in cooking and doing all kinds of work necessary in "camping out;" making almost the entire journey on foot, and being compensated for her laborious services with only food and lodging, and such protection as the company of those she attended, afforded her. Yet, throughout her life, she seemed to remember that family with warm affection, and spoke of them with gratitude; it was her first experience, since her doleful captivity, of human sympathy and home-feeling; and her generous heart overflowed towards those who gave it: her labors to serve them being esteemed as nothing in the balance.

When they reached the Susquehanna river—where she was to pay her own ferriage—such having been the agreement—she asked permission of the ferryman to paddle herself across in a small and leaky canoe lying on the shore near by. He consented, warning her, however, that it was unsafe; but she was an excellent swimmer and intent on saving her money, which she did, and crossed in safety. The people in the ferryboat were less fortunate; when half way across, one of the cows, affrighted, jumped overboard and swam back to shore. The Dutch farmer requested Mary to return with him and bring the animal over; and she did so, getting her on board,

holding her by the horn with the left hand, and having the thumb and finger of her right thrust into her nostrils; thus keeping the cow quiet for a distance of nearly a mile. A modern belle would laugh at such an instance of usefulness; but our grandmothers were more practical and would not have felt ashamed of it. Its happy consequences will soon be seen.

When the travellers arrived at their place of destination, Mary obtained employment for a few days in a family. It happened that a farmer by the name of Spears, who lived in the neighborhood, called in, and heard the girl's romantic history. His wife wanted some one to assist her in household duties, and Miss Nealy was recommended to the place; she accepted the proposal to go at once, and mounted behind her future father-in-law, rode to his house, where she remained some time waiting to find some party that might be going to Tennessee, for her fears of being recaptured by the Indians had grown stronger the farther she travelled westward.

We will now turn to another scene in this "over true tale." When her family had ascertained beyond doubt that she had been captured by the Indians, they gave up all hope of ever seeing her again. They grieved as for one dead; but there was one whose sorrow was all too quickly banished; the betrothed lover of Mary, who, judging that the smiles of a new love was the best consolation for his loss, speedily transferred his vows to another comely maiden, and was by this time on the eve of marriage. It happened about this period that Mary's brother went on business into the interior of Kentucky. On the very night of his arrival, at a rustic tavern, he fell in with several travellers, who were relating their different adventures after an excellent supper. One of them had come all the way from Pennsylvania, and described with graphic glee, the scene of the crossing of the Susquehanna by the Dutch emigrant family, the escape of the cow, and her recapture and bringing over by the heroic young woman. That girl, he added, had been a captive among the Indians, and had escaped from them. To this account young Nealy listened

with aroused attention. "Did you hear the young woman's name?" he eagerly asked. "They did call her Polly"—answered the stranger, "but I heard no other." "Did you observe that she was left-handed?" again the brother asked. "She certainly was," was the reply; "I noticed it both in pulling her canoe and in holding the cow." No farther information could be given; but this was enough. The brother had no doubt that this was indeed his long-lost sister, and that her course had been directed homeward. And now, what was to be done? He was convinced that no family would be likely to emigrate in a southwest direction in that time of peril; she had no chance of an escort to return home; and through the vast wilderness that intervened, how could an unprotected girl travel alone? He determined, therefore, himself to set out; go to the ferry on the Susquehanna, where the scene described was said to have taken place, and to trace his sister thence, if possible.

He set off accordingly, taking the precaution to make inquiry at every cabin, and of every person whom he met, lest he should pass her on the way. When in Virginia, he stopped one day to feed his horse, and make the usual inquiries at a farm house, and was told that a young woman who had been in captivity among the Indians, and had recently come to the country, was living in a family some six miles distant. Nealy lost not a moment; but flinging the saddle on his horse before he had tasted his corn, rode off in the direction pointed out. Before he had reached the house, he met his sister. What pen can describe that meeting?<sup>4</sup> We shall not attempt it.

Mary made immediate preparations to return home, but suffered many hardships, and was exposed to many dangers on their way through the almost trackless wild. The howling of wolves, the screams of panthers, and the low growl of bears were familiar sounds in her ears; but nothing daunted her save the fearful thought of again falling into the hands of

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<sup>4</sup> This noble brother died about five years ago, at his residence near Nashville, Tennessee.

merciless savages. Even after her reunion with her family, this terror so preyed on her mind that she had no peace, and her widowed mother yielded to her entreaties, and removed to a more secure home in Kentucky.

The story of Miss Nealy's return to Tennessee, and her strange adventures was soon noised abroad, and her former lover, repenting his infidelity, came once more to prefer his claim to her favor. It may be conceived with what scorn she spurned the addresses of a man who had not only lacked the energy to attempt her rescue from the Indians, and had soon forgotten her, but who was now crowning his perfidy by the basest falsehood towards the other fair one to whom his faith was pledged.

Mary Nealy was united in marriage to George Spears, on the 24th of February, 1785, at her new home in Lincoln County, Kentucky.<sup>5</sup> After her marriage, her mother returned with the rest of her family to Tennessee. Mrs. Spears and her husband continued to reside for two years near Carpenter's Station, in Lincoln County; and during the three succeeding years at or near Grey's Station, in Greene County, Kentucky. While living here it was her custom to accompany her husband to the field, sometimes in the capacity of guard, sometimes to help him hoe the corn; and always carrying her children with her. On one occasion, while thus occupied, they heard a whistle like the note of a wild turkey. One of their neighbors, an old hunter, cautioned them against following the sound, which he knew to be made by an Indian, whom he resolved to ferret out. He accordingly crept noiselessly along the ground, like one hunting the bird, till close to the spot whence the whistle came, when he fired, and an Indian fell.

On one occasion strange sounds were heard close to the dwelling at night, and Mrs. Spears looking through a "chink" in the cabin, saw the shadow of a man stealthily moving around the house. She awoke her husband; he climbed the

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<sup>5</sup> Date copied from Mrs. Spears' family Bible.

ladder to the loft, and putting his gun through an aperture in the roof, fired upon the savage. Five Indians started up and ran off; but he continued firing till the alarm was given at the fort, and aid was sent. A company of soldiers followed the trail for several miles, and judged the number of the savages to have been about fifty. While residing here, Mrs. Spears received intelligence of the murder of one of her brothers by the Indians.

Mr. Spears, who had no fear of them, was in the habit of going to the fort to try his skill in shooting at a target; and when he did not return by dusk, his wife would leave the cabin and betake herself with the child to the woods for safety, for her terror of the lurking enemies, whose cruelty she had so bitterly experienced, was very great. One night, having thus left her home, she was standing with her infant in her arms, under a wide spreading tree, awaiting the return of her husband, when she heard the shrill note of a screech-owl, directly over her head, and fell to the ground as if shot. She often described, in after life, the mortification she felt, on recovering from her fright; but excused herself by pleading that the fears which so overcame her were for the little helpless child. In times of peculiar danger, she was accustomed to do sewing and washing for two young men at the fort, in return for coming home every night with her husband, and lodging in the cabin.

On another occasion, when they had reason to believe a large body of Indians were in the neighborhood, and were warned to leave the cabin without loss of time, Mrs. Spears hastily buried her dishes, and emptying out part of the feathers from her bed, put it on her horse, with such other articles of household service as she could carry, mounted, taking her child in her lap though within two weeks of her second confinement—and assisted in driving away the stock. The alarm was given that the Indians were near and they must ride for their lives, and she urged her horse at full speed a mile and a half, with all her incumbrances. A party of soldiers was sent out from the fort to reconnoitre the enemy, and struck



the trail of some forty savages, but did not venture to follow them more than a few miles.

One day, a man named Fisher came from the fort to Mr. Spear's field, to bring a message to him. On his return he was pursued by Indians, and shot down and scalped in the sight of Mrs. Spears, before a gun could be brought to bear on the fierce assailants. Such incidents kept our pioneers in a continual state of suspense and dread, and during the time they were living in the fort for greater safety, their condition was but little more comfortable. Their cattle were continually driven off, and their hunters, as well as those who ventured out to till the ground, murdered by stealthy foes; so that they suffered terribly for want of provisions. While in the fort, Mrs. Spears heard of two more of her relations being killed by the Indians; five of her family in all, fell victims to savage fury.

The three oldest children of Mrs. Spears were born during those years of terror, when the border settlers suffered so severely. Mr. Spears was a man of intelligence and sincere piety; he was a kind husband, and as they were blest with health and competence, their home was a happy one. Mrs. Spears was gentle and amiable in her manners, and affectionate in her nature, with a warm and generous heart; always modest and yielding, except when sterner qualities were in requisition, when the strength and firmness of her nature were apparent. She made no attempt at any time to divest herself of early habits, in conformity to the improvements of the time, or changing fashions. A carriage was always at her disposal, yet she preferred riding on horseback when the journey was not too long; and in such cases she used a large covered farm wagon. Always charitable to the poor, and liberal to all with whom she had dealings, her industry and systematic housewifery were admirable, and not a moment of her time was ever wasted. Besides being engaged in weaving, sewing, and other domestic employments, she made salves, ointments, and decoctions continually for all the afflicted of her acquaintance. Her knowledge of medicine

was made available to her friends and neighbors and to the poor generally, gratuitously; while she accepted compensation from such as came from a distance and were able to offer it. It was a desire to do good which first induced her to undertake the most laborious duties of a physician among her own sex, medical practitioners being very scarce in that region; and her success soon made her so celebrated, that her aid was sought from every direction. She became fond of the practice, and continued to ride her circuit until a few months before her death.

There were some incidents in her experience, even after the cessation of Indian hostilities, which are highly illustrative. One morning, her husband went out a short distance, taking his gun, and bidding her to follow him with his knife, if she heard firing. Hearing a report soon after, she ran with the knife in the direction of the sound, and heard soon after a second shot. Mr. Spears snatched the knife from her hands and plunged it to the handle into—a monstrous bear, “which” Mrs. Spears used to say, “had in its embrace our biggest and best sow. It was some time before the sow recovered her breath, as each shot caused the bear to hug the tighter, though not a bone was broken.”

Mrs. Spears was fond of high-mettled horses, and was accustomed to ride a very spirited one. Her husband warned her that the animal was apt to run away; but our heroine declared she would cure the propensity, which she did one day, when the mare had run about a mile with her, by suddenly checking, so as to cause the animal to dash its head against the trunk of a beech-tree by the roadside, while the fearless rider sprang off in time to save herself.

At one time Mrs. Spears was sent for in great haste to attend a woman living on the opposite side of Green river, several miles distant. Her own babe was too young to leave, and she set off on horseback carrying it in her arms. Arriving at the river, she found that the ferry boat had just pushed from shore. She called to the man to return, urging the necessity of the case, but the man replied that his load was too heavy. On this the spirited matron urged her mare into the river,

swam her past the ferry boat, reached the opposite bank first, and was in time to thank the ferryman for his humanity before his boat touched the landing. The child she carried on this occasion was accustomed to relate this anecdote, and its truth was confirmed by the old neighbors in Kentucky, among whom the lady to whom we are indebted for this memoir, travelled a little more than a year ago.

Mr. and Mrs. Spears removed with their servants—a negro boy and girl—to Illinois in 1824. Their three surviving children, all of whom had families, accompanied them. All had prospered and were comfortable in their worldly circumstances. They settled at Clary's Grove, in Menard County. The parents were blessed in their children, and had "godliness with contentment." Mrs. Spears' solicitous care for her servants, in regard not only to bodily comfort, but moral and religious culture, equalled that she had bestowed on her own children, and it was returned by the most devoted affection and willing obedience. When the boy—Jim—became of age, his mistress gave him a liberal outfit with liberty to depart if he chose to do so; but he preferred remaining with her. By thrifty increase of his store, Jim was enabled afterwards to purchase both his parents, who belonged to a relative of Mrs. Spears, then residing in Missouri. They were redeemed by the dutiful son, and brought to Clary's Grove but a very short time since. The sympathy and aid given by Jim's mistress to this cherished project, may throw additional light on her most lovely and christian character.

At a very advanced age—between eighty and ninety—Mrs. Spears visited her brother in Tennessee. This brother in the time of the Indian war was riding in company with her mother when she was wounded by a shot from an Indian. He killed the assailant, but while attempting to place his mother again in the saddle received a shot from another lurking savage. A man who accompanied them helped him to mount his horse, and the party made good their escape. On her way to visit this brother, Mrs. Spears travelled in a large covered wagon, and was accompanied by her grandson, a boy about fourteen

years of age. They camped out every night. During one day Mrs. Spears had noticed a horseman pass them several times, and attentively mark, as she thought, one of her best horses. Apprehensive of thievish intent, she had her bed laid that night upon the ground that her quick ear might catch the sound of approaching footsteps. In the dead silence of the night she heard the sound, and raising herself with a loud voice, demanded who was there? The intruder retired without making any answer, but in the space of an hour or two returned, with the same stealthy step, which was again detected by the watchful matron. Starting up, she repeated her question, and when no reply came, charged the man with his nefarious design, and threatened punishment if he dared to come again. The thief did not seem inclined to give up his prey, but came the third time on horseback. The matron aware of his approach, prepared herself for him, and as he came near, suddenly sprang towards him, holding a large article of dress, which she flapped in his horse's face with such a report that the animal wheeled round in affright, and bounded swiftly out of her sight. Then the thought struck her, perhaps the rider had been thrown and killed; and she was uneasy, till by laying her ear to the ground she could hear the regular receding tramp of the horse, showing that the man had escaped without injury.

Mrs. Spears died at her residence at Clary's Grove, on the 26th January, 1852, surrounded by affectionate children and grandchildren, who still reverently cherish the memory of her virtues, and look to the example of her well-spent and useful life. The times of trial which nurtured such noble natures, by developing their strength and power of endurance, may never return in our powerful and prosperous country; yet have we all work to do in the great battle of life, and not without lasting benefit may we contemplate the character of those heroic matrons who bore so much of the burden in our struggle for independence, and whose influence was so controlling and extensive, though unacknowledged in the history which deals only with the actions of men.

A page of records copied from Mary Neely Spears' Bible. which is now owned by James B. Beekman, of Jacksonville.

George Spears<sup>6</sup> married to Mary Neely, February 24, 1785. George Spears, son of George Spears and Christiana, his wife, was born August 11, 1764, died April 16, 1838.

Mary Neely, now Mary Spears, daughter of William and Margaret (Pattison) Neely, was born August 20, 1761. (Added by son), Died January 26, 1852.

Sons and daughters of George and Mary Spears:

Hanna Spears, born Dec. 27, 1785.

William Spears, born Oct. 17, 1787.

Mary Spears, born Aug. 2, 1789

John Spears, born August 1, 1792.

Solomon Spears, born May 17, 1795.

David Spears, born Oct. 2, 1797.

Elizabeth Spears, born Aug. 4, 1799.

George Spears, born March 9, 1805.

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<sup>6</sup> George Spears, husband of Mary Neely, enlisted among the patriots of the Revolution, and served as lieutenant in the war of 1812.